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TAGS: PARM PREL PGOV MASS PTER EG
SUBJECT: ASD MCHALE'S DISCUSSIONS ON CIVIL DEFENSE WITH THE
GOE

Classified By: Classified by ECPO Minister-Counselor William R. Stewart
for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary. On February 28, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and American Security Affairs Paul McHale briefed the Ambassador on his February 27 meetings with Egyptian military officials. ASD McHale noted that he wants to increase USG engagement with Egypt on involving the Egyptian military in civil defense, and suggested inviting the Egyptians to two U.S.-based civil emergency exercises later in 2008. ASD McHale proposed organizing a symposium at the Army War College in the fall of 2008 where Egyptian officials could discuss civil defense issues with their U.S. counterparts. The Ambassador noted that President Mubarak's recent decision to improve the military's role in crisis response represents an important change in GOE thinking. MG Collings said that the GOE is still focused on acquiring military hardware, and may resist diverting funds to civil defense. End summary.

¶2. (C) On February 27, ASD McHale met in Cairo with Ministry of Defense Chief of Staff General Sami Enan, Assistant Minister of Defense for Policy Major General Mohammed Al-Assar, Assistant Minister of Defense for Armament Major General Fouad Abdel Halim, and MOD American Affairs Chief Major General Ahmed Motaz. ASD McCale told the Ambassador that General Enan had asked him to visit Cairo to discuss deploying the military in a civilian role to manage humanitarian crises. McHale briefed General Enan on the U.S. military's role in the wake of 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and forest fires in the Western United States. McHale believes that his dialogue with General Enan could form the basis for more intensive U.S.-Egyptian engagement within the politically benign context of civil emergency response, separate from the regional tensions that often permeate bilateral discussions. ASD McHale suggested inviting Egyptian officials to two U.S.-based civil emergency exercises: 1) "Ardent Security," a DHS-DoD exercise in May 2008 run by Northcom and including SecDef participation; and 2) "Vigilant Shield," scheduled for fall 2008.

¶3. (C) ASD McHale proposed organizing a symposium at the Army War College in the fall of 2008 where Egyptian officials could discuss civil defense issues with their U.S. counterparts. He thought that DHS Secretary Chertoff or SecDef Gates could be featured speakers. McHale said he believes the Army War College could be an ideal venue because it is a known quantity as many Egyptian military officers have studied there, and it would provide some privacy away from the media's glare. ASD McHale outlined three goals for his engagement with the Egyptians: 1) an improvement in Egyptian military participation in civil defense; 2) a

U.S.-Egyptian bilateral dialogue on civil defense, perhaps eventually broadened to be multilateral with the Israelis; 3) providing U.S. assistance to facilitate GOE civil defense mission capabilities. The ASD said that the DHS Assistant Secretary for International Affairs could facilitate USG-GOE

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bilateral engagement.

¶ 4. (S) The Ambassador explained that he had initially laid out three areas for the Egyptian military to expand into: 1) civil defense; 2) border security; and 3) peace-keeping. The GOE initially resisted these suggestions, but after Egypt was embarrassed on the world stage following the February 2006 Red Sea ferry accident, President Mubarak charged Mindef Tantawi with involving the military in improving crisis response management. The Ambassador said that this action constitutes an important change in the Egyptian leadership's thinking.

¶ 5. (S) MG Collings noted that diverting funds into civil defense will be difficult for the Egyptians as the GOE is focused on acquiring military hardware. He explained that the MOD has coordination problems due to its culture and its emphasis on maintaining tight control over internal and external communications from the very top of the ministry. The military is as effective as President Mubarak wants it to be, and the leadership has created intentional firewalls in command and control so that only the senior command can control operational readiness. Regarding the idea of multilateral engagement on civil defense with the GOE, MG Collings noted that some Gulf countries have been standoffish toward Egypt. For example, Bahrain recently refused the Egyptians visas to attend an activity at Navcent in Manama. MG Collings noted that the GOE has asked for more information about civil defense-related activities for Defmin Tantawi when he visits Chicago later in March.

¶ 6. (S) Comment: It will be important to bring younger Egyptian military and civilian officials into a new way of thinking through trips to the U.S. and increased engagement. Pitfalls for bilateral civil defense engagement will be Egyptian anxiety over perceived U.S. interference in GOE sovereignty, but with leadership changes on the horizon, now is the time to build bridges to the next generation of Egyptian leaders.

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